

**First English
translation of
Rosa Luxemburg's
'Martinique'**

Translated by David Wolff

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*Editor's Note: This January marks the sixty-fourth anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg's brutal murder in the midst of the 1919 German Revolution. "Martinique" was written shortly after a volcanic eruption occurred at the port of St. Pierre in May, 1902. It was originally published in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on May 15, 1902.*

Mountains of smoking ruins, heaps of mangled corpses, a steaming, smoking sea of fire wherever you turn, mud and ashes — that is all that remains of the flourishing little city which perched on the rocky slope of the volcano like a fluttering swallow. For some time the angry giant had been heard to rumble and rage against this human presumption, the blind self-conceit of the two-legged dwarfs. Great-hearted even in his wrath, a true giant, he warned the reckless creatures that crawled at his feet. He smoked, spewed out fiery clouds, in his bosom there was



Rosa Luxemburg

seething and boiling and explosions like rifle volleys and cannon thunder. But the lords of the

earth, those who ordain human destiny, remained with faith unshaken — in their own wisdom.

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On the 7th, the commission dispatched by the government announced to the anxious people of St. Pierre that all was in order in heaven and on earth. All is in order, no cause for alarm! — as they said on the eve of the Oath of the Tennis Court in the dance-intoxicated halls of Louis XVI, while in the crater of the revolutionary volcano fiery lava was gathering for the fearful eruption. All is in order, peace and quiet everywhere! — as they said in Vienna and Berlin on the eve of the March eruption 50 years ago. The old, long-suffering titan of Martinique paid no heed to the reports of the honourable commission; after the people had been reassured by the governor on the 7th, he erupted in the early hours of the 8th and buried in a few minutes the governor, the commission, the people, houses, streets and ships under the fiery exhalation of his indignant heart.

THE WORK was radically thorough. Forty thousand human lives mowed down, a handful of trembling refugees rescued — the old giant can rumble and bubble in peace, he has shown his might, he has fearfully avenged the slight to his primordial power.

And now in the ruins of the annihilated city on Martinique a new guest arrives, unknown, never seen before — the human being. Not lords and bondsmen, not Blacks and whites, not rich and poor, not plantation owners and wage slaves — human beings have appeared on the tiny shattered island, human beings who feel only the pain and see only the disaster, who only want to help and succor. Old Mt. Pelee has worked a miracle! Forgotten are the days of Fashoda, forgotten the conflict over Cuba, forgotten "la Revanche" — the French and the English, the Tsar and the Senate of Washington, Germany and Holland donate money, send telegrams, extend the helping hand. A brotherhood of peoples against nature's burning hatred, a resurrection of humanism on the ruins of human culture. The price of recalling their humanity was high, but thundering Mt. Pelee had a voice to catch their ear.

France weeps over the tiny island's 40,000 corpses, and the whole world hastens to dry the tears of the mourning Mother Republic. But how was it then, centuries ago, when France spilled blood in torrents for the Lesser and Greater Antilles? In the sea off the east coast of Africa lies a volcanic island — Madagascar: 50 years ago there we saw the disconsolate Republic who weeps for her lost

children today, how she bowed the obstinate native people to her yoke with chains and the sword. No volcano opened its crater there: the mouths of French cannons spewed out death and annihilation; French artillery fire swept thousands of flowering human lives from the face of the earth until a free people lay prostrate on the ground, until the brown queen of the "savages" was dragged off as a trophy to the "City of Light."

On the Asiatic coast, washed by the waves of the ocean, lie the smiling Philippines. Six years ago we saw the benevolent Yankees; we saw the Washington Senate at work there. Not fire-spewing mountains — there, American rifles mowed down human lives in heaps; the sugar cartel Senate which today sends golden dollars to Martinique, thousands upon thousands, to coax life back from the ruins, sent cannon upon cannon, warship upon warship, golden dollars millions upon millions to Cuba, to sow death and devastation.

YESTERDAY, TODAY — far off in the African south, where only a few years ago a tranquil little people lived by their labor and in peace, there we saw how the English wreak havoc, these same Englishmen who in Martinique save the mother her children and the children their parents: there we saw them stamp on human bodies, on children's corpses with brutal soldiers' boots, wading in pools of blood, death and misery before them and behind.

Ah, and the Russians, the rescuing, helping, weeping Tsar of All the Russians — an old acquaintance! We have seen you on the ramparts of Praga, where warm Polish blood flowed in streams and turned the sky red with its steam. But those were the old days. No! Now, only a few weeks ago, we have seen you benevolent Russians on your dusty highways, in ruined Russian villages eye to eye with the ragged, wildly agitated, grumbling mob; gunfire rattled, gasping muzhiks fell to the earth, red peasant blood mingled with the dust of the highway. They must die, they must fall because their bodies doubled up with hunger, because they cried out for bread, for bread!

And we have seen you too, oh Mother Republic, you tear-distiller. It was on May 23 of 1871: the glorious spring sun shone down on Paris; thousands of pale human beings in working clothes stood packed together on the streets, in prison courtyards, body to body and head to head;

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Rosa Luxemburg's sensitivity to Black oppression helped shape her struggles against both German imperialism and her own Social Democratic leadership. Above, Nama and Herero guerrillas who fought brutal repression in German Southwest Africa (Namibia) are described in Luxemburg's *Theory and Practice* (see ad on back cover).

through loopholes in the walls, mitrailleuses thrust their bloodthirsty muzzles. No volcano erupted, no lava stream poured down. Your cannons, Mother Republic, were turned on the tight-packed human crowd, screams of pain rent the air — over 20,000 corpses covered the pavements of Paris!

AND ALL OF YOU — whether French and English, Russians and Germans, Italians and Americans — we have seen you all together once before in brotherly accord, united in a great league of nations, helping and guiding one another: it was in China. There too you forgot all quarrels among yourselves, there too you made a peace of peoples — for mutual murder and the torch. Ha, how the pigtails fell in rows under your bullets, like a ripe grainfield lashed by the hail! Ha, how the wailing women plunged into the water, their dead in their cold arms, fleeing the torture of your ardent embraces!

And now they have all turned to Martinique, all one heart and one mind again; they help, rescue, dry the tears and curse the havoc-wreaking volcano. Mt. Pelee, greathearted giant, you can laugh; you can look down in loathing at these benevolent murderers, at these weeping carnivores, at these beasts in Samaritan's clothing. But a day will come when another volcano lifts its voice of thunder: a volcano that is seething and boiling, whether you heed it or not, and will sweep the whole sanctimonious, blood-spattered culture from the face of the earth. And only on its ruins will the nations come together in true humanity, which will know but one deadly foe — blind, dead nature.

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Editor's Note: With the publication of the Marxist-Humanist work Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, we are expanding our "Who We Are and What We Stand For"

Who We Are and

News and Letters Committees, an organization of Marxist-Humanists, stand for the abolition of capitalism, whether in its private property form as in the U.S., or its state property form as in Russia or China. We stand for the development of a new human society based on the principles of Marx's Humanism as recreated for our day.

News & Letters was created so that the voices of revolt from below could be heard not separated from the articulation of a philosophy of liberation. A Black production worker, Charles Denby, author of *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*, is the editor of the paper. Raya Dunayevskaya, the Chairwoman of the National Editorial Board and National Chairwoman of the Committees, is the author of *Marxism and Freedom, Philosophy and Revolution* and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, which spell out the philosophic ground of Marx's Humanism internationally as *American Civilization on Trial* concretizes it on the American scene and shows the two-way road between the U.S. and Africa.

Where *Marxism and Freedom*, whose structure was grounded in the movement from practice throughout the 200 years from 1776 to Today discloses Marx's "new Humanism," both internationally and in its American roots, *Philosophy and Revolution*, in recreating Marx's philosophic roots both in the Hegelian dialectic and in the actual revolutionary movements of his day, articulated these forces of revolution as Reason — Labor, Black, Youth, Women — of our day. By tracing and paralleling this age's 30-year movement from practice to theory with our own theoretical development for the same three decades, Marxist-Humanism in the U.S. has met the challenge of the "new moments" in the last decade of Marx's life by disclosing in them a trail to the 1980s. It is this trail, these paths of revolution — be it in the birth of a whole new generation of revolutionaries, including the transformation of Women's Liberation as an idea whose time has come into a Movement or the emergence of a whole new Third World — that form the content

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statement to more fully present our revolutionary philosophic heritage as reflected in all three major works by Raya Dunayevskaya as well as in the archives of Marxist-Humanism over a 30 year period.

What We Stand For

of Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution. This work challenges post-Marx Marxists to return to Marx's Marxism. At a time when the nuclear world is threatened with the extinction of civilization itself it becomes imperative not only to reject what is, but to reveal the revolutionary Humanist future inherent in the present.

News & Letters was founded in 1955, the year of the Detroit wildcats against Automation and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against segregation — activities which signalled a new movement from practice which was itself a form of theory. Vol. 1, No. 1, came off the press on the second anniversary of the June 17, 1953 East German revolt against Russian state-capitalism masquerading as Communism, in order to express our solidarity with freedom fighters abroad as well as at home. Because 1953 was also the year when we worked out the revolutionary dialectics of Marxism in its original form of "a new Humanism," as well as individuality "purified of all that interferes with its universalism, i.e., with freedom itself," we organized ourselves in Committees rather than any elitist party "to lead". The development of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S., 1941 to Today is recorded in the documents and on microfilm available to all under title the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection on deposit at the Labor History Archives of Wayne State University.

In opposing the capitalistic, racist, sexist, exploitative society, we participate in all class and freedom struggles, nationally and internationally. As our Constitution states: "It is our aim . . . to promote the firmest unity among workers, Blacks and other minorities, women, youth and those intellectuals who have broken with the ruling bureaucracy of both capital and labor." We do not separate the mass activities from the activity of thinking. Anyone who is a participant in these freedom struggles for totally new relations and a fundamentally new way of life, and who believes in these principles, is invited to join us. Send for a copy of the Constitution of News and Letters Committees.

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